6; Tomasic E-4 (1947-1948) 1953 RF1 Great Russia RF1
[XI century]

and hence, no group support could be found if a leader had attempted to form a centralized political authority or an imperial system over the whole area. The old Russian Chronicle of Kiev (12th century) describing a tribe with such a culture (the Polians) states that among them each kindred group (*rod*) lived in its own separate locality and had its own government.[4]

In a like manner, principles of dignity and moderation, as well as personal autonomy and lack of coerciveness, prevailed in family relations of these people. The Chronicle, for instance, states:

> The Polians had customs of their fathers, customs mild and peaceful (*krotok i tikh*); they showed a kind of reserve (*stydenie*) towards their daughters-in-law (*snokha*) and their sisters, towards their mothers and their parents, towards their fathers-in-law and their brothers-in-law; to all of the persons named they showed great reserve. They had marriage cusoms: the bridegroom did not go to seek his bride; she was taken to him in the evening, and the following morning they brought what belonged to her (*chto vdaduche*).[5]

It appears that the family organization of the Polians rested on mutual respect of all family members; that the bride brought the dowry which remained her personal property; that she might have had the initiative in wooing. This contention is supported by other evidence. Cosmas Pragensis, for instance, speaking of the old Bohemian Slavs, states: "It is not the men who choose the maids, but the maids themselves who take the husbands they like, and when they like."[6] A French writer who visited Ukraine in the seventeenth century wrote: "In Ukraine, contrary to the customs of all other nations, the husbands do not choose their wives, but are themselves chosen by their future consorts."[7]

There is also other evidence concerning some matriarchal traits of the early Slavs.[8] Throughout ages, women of the plains betwen the Dnieper and the Volga maintained property rights over their dowries and also over income from vegetables, poultry, dairy products and yarn that they produced and sold, though such rights were not recognized to men.[9] Although a woman in Russia did not have any claim to the property of her father or her brother, and only a limited right to that of her husband, she had the privilege, denied to a man, of saving and building up a

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korobka (chest) of her own. When a girl married, she took her korobka, together with the property given her by her father or brothers, to her new home as a dowry and was allowed to dispose freely of it. At the same time her husband was not responsible for her debts.[10] When a married woman died, if childless, her korobka, as a rule, returned to her mother (matrilineal succession) and only if her mother was not alive, to her father. In some provinces the husband would inherit his wife's property if he lived with her four years or more.[11] If she had children, her property was inherited by both sons and daughters equally.[12]

Matriarchal traits are evident in contemporary folk philosophy and many folk customs in the Bielorussian villages as well as in some parts of the Ukraine. In the oral poetry of these people, for instance, the sun is represented as a female who is wooing the moon, her bridegroom. In some songs of these peasant folk the maidens contend with the male youths in duels and defeat them.[13] Even today in some of these regions it is often the girls who take the initiative in finding their suitors. During harvest festivals, it is the maidens who play the leading part. Traces of the capture of the bridegroom still persist in the folk customs of the Ukraine. In Ukrainian and Bielorussian folk poetry women, especially the mother, play a very significant role, while the place of the father is less outstanding. In popular opinion in this area, the consent of the mother in the marriage of a daughter is considered more important than that of the father.

Marriage among the Old-Slavonic peasant folk was endogamous within the village community and perhaps even within the joint household community (*verv, zadruga*)—not unlike in the Croatian zadruga of our days.[14] There was also, apparently, a particularly developed brother-sister attachment as is manifested by brother-sister incest which seems to have taken place occasionally in some Russian regions until recently.[15] There were, therefore, abundant opportunities for emotional attachments in the Old-Slavonic family, since there were no external political, economic, or social pressures that might have disturbed internal equalitarian family relationships. Such relationships have persisted until present times in certain parts of Ukraine:

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force behind the war expeditions of these predatory warriors might have been their need for self-assertion and dominance, as well as an urge for destruction. They were therefore likely to indulge in sadistic cruelty and in mass plunder, in lechery and debauchery.

It is important to notice, however, that in these conquests the mounted nomads would often invade and settle distant areas without their womenfolk. Therefore, when these womenless, predatory, patriarchal and polygynous horsemen invaded the plains and river valleys between the Ural mountains and the Carpathians, where the Old-Slavonic soil cultivators, Fino-Ugric hunters and other folks were settled, the newcomers not only imposed themselves as political rulers, but it became necessary for them to abduct native women *en masse*, to buy them, or to demand them as a tribute, and make them their wives, concubines, and slaves. Not only the historical records but the Great-Russian marriage customs, folk poetry and other oral literature testify to this trend of events. Marriage by capture, bride price and the use of women as slave laborers figure prominently in all these documents.

At first a great cultural diversity in the society at large resulted out of such a situation. Many early observers of the peoples of this area noticed this phenomenon. Often the customs of the peoples that went under the same name were very dissimilar. The same names covered a conglomeration of tillers of the soil, pastoral nomads, nomadic hunters, and warlike tribes. Some of these people were matriarchal, others patriarchal. Some of them lived in wagons and tents, others built houses. Some cremated their dead, others practiced inhumation. Some were cannibalistic, others vegetarians.[3]

It is for this reason that early observers when speaking of "Slavs" sometimes give contradictory data.[4] Such accounts are likely to confuse a student of early Slav society unless he keeps in mind the ethnical mixture and blending of cultures that was taking place in that area in the course of many centuries. Tacitus, for instance, noticed that "The Veneti [Slavs] have borrowed largely from Sarmatian character; in their plundering expeditions they roam over the whole extent of forests and mountains. . . ."[5]

3 [i.e. of the Turko-Mongols — Analyst]

7: Lineva B-5 (no date)1893 RFI Great Russia RFI

called the *svat*. It is his business to praise up the person he represents and to obtain easy conditions. This part is sometimes taken by an old and experienced relation of the groom.

As there is but little time to arrange a marriage, the two *svats*, on starting out, receive the names of several families in which to enquire for brides, and therefore it is a busy week in the village—many *svats* going about from house to house. They are dressed in holiday attire, which is a sufficient sign of their mission (these visits taking place mostly in the evenings during the week). The *svat* carries with him a quart of brandy, that he may offer the necessary treat during the negotiations.

The two *svats* slowly and solemnly enter the house, where they find the girl dressed up in her best, sitting at the table with her father and mother. When a prospective bride sees them she goes away and hides. The negotiations are opened and conducted with a great deal of ceremony, as the peasants are great sticklers for propriety and the girl would be highly offended if any formality were omitted, or the wedding celebrated with a particle less pomp than the family can afford. After the first courtesies, the *svats* are asked to sit down at the head of the room by the table. They refuse, upon one pretext or another, (as being cold, etc.,) and try to get a place under the middle beam of the ceiling, that being a good omen. Their attire, ceremonious behavior, etc., show plainly on what business they have come, and the actions and answers of the people of the house show them, in turn, whether or not they are welcome and what decision they may expect. Thus both sides proceed very cautiously.

The business opens with a general conversation about the weather, the price of wheat, etc. After a while the *svat* mentions casually, that he has heard the people of the house have a commodity to sell, and that he has a buyer for it, (this feature is quite plainly a relic of the ancient form of marriage by purchase). If the father says there is a mistake, that he did, indeed, have a commodity, but it is sold (which means that the girl has already been promised), then the *svats* take their departure in a little while and go to the next house on the list. If an excuse is

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Another picture refering to the wedding ceremonial is the one of Korsukhin, to be seen at the same place, and a copy of which we reproduce on page 16 of this book. It represents the return of the bride from the bath on the eve of the marriage, with her companions and the *svakha*, with songs and dances, while one maiden sweeps the path before the bride. This is a bit of superstition, and illustrates the fear that the bride might be bewitched by something thrown in her way.

4. The blessing of the bride by her parents. As the parents of the young couple do not go to church, the wedding procession is evidently the relic of the ancient form of marriage by capture, which was customary with the Russians in prehistoric times.

5. The arrival of the groom with his kinsmen, representing the ancient clan, who used to help him capture the bride. The whole party goes in procession to the church, for the celebration of the sacred rite,—with shouting, bell-ringing, etc.